

NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES



3 3433 08235137 4

LINCOLN  
THE LEADER



RICHARD WATSON GILDER

dx  
100

IN MEMORY  
OF  
ANNA MARSHALL  
PURCHASED FROM FUNDS PRESENTED TO  
THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY  
BY HER FORMER STUDENTS

March

AN  
Lincoln  
Gilder

Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2008 with funding from  
Microsoft Corporation

<http://www.archive.org/details/lincolleaderlin00gild>



By Richard Watson Gilder

Poems, Household Edition, \$1.50

CONTENTS

THE NEW DAY

THE CELESTIAL PASSION

LYRICS

TWO WORLDS

THE GREAT REMEMBRANCE

IN PALESTINE AND OTHER POEMS

POEMS AND INSCRIPTIONS

"IN THE HEIGHTS"

THE FIRE DIVINE

IN HELENA'S GARDEN

Lincoln the Leader, 16mo,  
\$1.00 net. Postage extra

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

BOSTON AND NEW YORK]

# **LINCOLN THE LEADER**



# LINCOLN THE LEADER

AND

## LINCOLN'S GENIUS FOR EXPRESSION

BY

RICHARD WATSON GILDER



BOSTON AND NEW YORK  
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY  
The Riverside Press Cambridge  
1909

BW

NEW YORK  
1909

THE NEW YORK  
PUBLIC LIBRARY

65427A

ACTS OF GOD AND  
HUMAN NEGLIGENCE

BY RICHARD WATSON GILDER

COPYRIGHT, 1909, BY RICHARD WATSON GILDER

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

*Published October 1909*

## CONTENTS

LINCOLN THE LEADER	I
LINCOLN'S GENIUS FOR EXPRESSION	61



# **LINCOLN THE LEADER**

## ON THE LIFE-MASK OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

This bronze doth keep the very form and mold  
Of our great martyr's face. Yes, this is he :  
That brow all wisdom, all benignity ;  
That human, humorous mouth ; those cheeks that  
hold  
Like some harsh landscape all the summer's gold ;  
That spirit fit for sorrow, as the sea  
For storms to beat on ; the lone agony  
Those silent, patient lips too well foretold.  
Yes, this is he who ruled a world of men  
As might some prophet of the elder day —  
Brooding above the tempest and the fray  
With deep-eyed thought and more than mortal ken.  
A power was his beyond the touch of art  
Or armèd strength — his pure and mighty heart.

## LINCOLN THE LEADER<sup>1</sup>

### I

IT was not many years after the Civil War that I first came to New York. There I met, with youth's curiosity and admiration for genius and distinction, among other literary lights of the day, Edmund Clarence Stedman, who had struck out that dynamic lyric on Ossawatomie Brown, prophetic of the war, who had addressed to the President the demand for a captain,—“Abraham Lincoln, give us a man!”—a demand which it took Lincoln so long and through so many disappointments to satisfy, and who had written the ringing sonnet on

<sup>1</sup> First read before the Minnesota Commandery of the Loyal Legion, at Minneapolis, February 12, 1907; and since revised and somewhat extended.

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

the assassination, in which Lincoln is described as “the whitest soul a nation knew”; Bayard Taylor, who had been of special service to Lincoln at the important court of St. Petersburg; John Bigelow, who had served the cause of the Union in Paris; Richard Grant White, who had interpreted the Union cause in his “New Gospel of Peace,” and had gathered the war-songs into a unique volume; Richard Henry Stoddard, who had written an eloquent ode on the death of Lincoln; Dr. J. G. Holland, who had written a life of the President, the first of any moment to be put forth after his death—a still valuable contribution; Noah Brooks, who had been close to Lincoln in Washington; Bret Harte, author, among other famous pieces, of certain memorable lyrics of the war; George William Curtis, who

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

had taken part in both the conventions that nominated Lincoln, and officially notified him of his second nomination; and, a seldom and picturesque revisitor of his beloved Manhattan, Walt Whitman, who had written "Captain, My Captain," and the passionate chant on the death of the President, "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed." A familiar and majestic figure of the time was the poet Bryant, who had presided on the occasion of Lincoln's Cooper Union Speech, when each had been greatly impressed by the other, Lincoln saying, "It was worth the journey to the East merely to meet such a man," and Bryant becoming, soon after, one of Lincoln's chief supporters for the Presidential nomination.

A certain young journalist and author in the literary group greatly attracted

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

me. I remember writing to him in those days a boyish, enthusiastic letter enrolling him in the company of "good fellows" — the good-hearted, the art-loving, the genial. There was a special fascination about him. He had a quiet, intense sense of humor; a wit that was genial, though it could be stinging; and a piquant poise and reticence. He was as self-confident as he was courteous and modest.

To him I said one day, "Colonel, as you continue your study of Lincoln, and your writing about him, does he seem to you greater or less?"

To this,—and I remember the seriousness of his manner,—John Hay answered, "As I go on with the work, to me Lincoln grows greater and greater."

Since then, as the historical students and the people of his country and of the

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

world have studied and better known his life, characteristics, and accomplishments, Abraham Lincoln has grown greater and greater in the estimation of mankind. Very largely, indeed, has the writing of John Hay himself, and of the elder devoted co-biographer, John G. Nicolay, helped in this better understanding. Lincoln's praises are multiplied in all lands by statesmen, historians, orators, poets. Added to the common admiring regard in which he is held, one constantly comes upon a peculiar interest in him, an absorbing affection for him, on the part of all sorts of people, some of whom were his contemporaries, and some who were children during his life, or born since his living day. A man of light and leading in our Southern States told me lately that to him Lincoln was one of the four most interesting per-

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

sonalities in all history, one of the others being no less than "the man of Galilee."

As the study of Lincoln has continued, it has become more and more evident that he was no mere accident of politics. In his nomination and election there was no accident or miracle. But there was, indeed, a miracle, and one which strengthens the more it is contemplated — the ancient miracle of individual genius. Why did the boy who fished little Abe out of Knob Creek remain the simple, worthy, but, save for this one act, unknown person that he was, while the boy that was rescued became a man fit for the companionship of Solomon and of Shakespeare: not a President merely, not a liberator merely, not a martyr merely, — but a man of such surpassing character and sagacity as to

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

dominate, by native right, in one of the most terrific conflicts recorded in human annals.

### II

It is natural that a writer should be specially attracted to Lincoln by a study of his recorded utterances ; in other words, by an interest in his literary style. Too young to appreciate what may be called the artistic quality of his speeches and writings at the time of their delivery, it was after the war that I awoke to a full appreciation of Lincoln's power of expression — a power which was one of the main elements of his strength as a leader.

It is not strange that an unusual faculty of expression should be found to belong to those who have risen to leadership among men. This expressiveness may be of various kinds. Lincoln and

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

Gladstone having been contemporaries, born in the same year, and each rising to the highest leadership in the two great English-speaking nations, it is natural that they should be compared as to their use of language spoken and written. Gladstone's elaborate and persuasive eloquence, his manifold learning and richly stored memory, the copiousness of his diction, and the dignity, as well as the fire and energy of his forensic appeals—these were among the wonders of a good part of the last century. But, on separate occasions, I asked of two of Gladstone's most eminent parliamentary supporters and admirers, without contradiction, and, indeed, with full agreement on the part of both, whether it was not one of the miracles of genius that, notwithstanding Gladstone had enjoyed all that culture could accomplish, — by means of uni-

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

versity training, and familiarity with the art and literature of the ancient and modern world, and long training and leadership in public life,—he had not left a single masterpiece of English, hardly one great phrase that clings to the memory of men; while Lincoln, without any educational advantages whatever, growing up in the backwoods, with scarcely a dozen books of rank and value at his command, and ignorant of the literature and art of modern Europe, as of ancient times, had acquired a style of higher distinction than that of Gladstone, and had bequeathed more than one masterpiece to the literature of the English tongue.

Lincoln's style in speech and writing is the same sort of miracle that gave us the consummate art of Shakespeare, the uncolleged actor; of Burns, the plow-

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

man ; and of Keats, the apothecary's apprentice, son of a livery-stableman. It is not easy to analyze a miracle, but in discussing the leadership of Lincoln it is interesting to find certain qualities in his literary style that are traits of his character, and thus elements of his leadership.

Notwithstanding that the country has been ransacked for every record of his public speech, and every scrap of paper to which he put pen, there has been found from him absolutely nothing discreditable, and little that can be criticized in the way of expression. Without the aid of any teacher, he early learned to be moderate and reasonable in statement, so that on the part even of the obscure young politician there is a complete absence of that kind of public speech which is described in a passage

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

he loved to quote, where it is said of the orator that “he mounted the rostrum, threw back his head, shined his eyes, and left the consequences to God.”

### III

Lincoln’s relish for a phrase like this recalls his extraordinary sense of humor. Probably no great historical figure in the realm of action ever had Lincoln’s intense humorousness, combined with so keen and racy a wit. Emerson notes in his journal “a sort of boyish cheerfulness, or that kind of sincerity and jolly good meaning that our class meetings on Commencement Days show, in telling our old stories over. When he has made his remark, he looks up at you with great satisfaction, and shows all his white teeth, and laughs.” Lincoln’s laugh could be something amazing. His face, in repose

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

well-balanced and commanding, with his heartiest laughter is said to have become a surprising thing. Many anecdotes relate the boisterousness of his appreciation of a humorous situation or story. Hay tells of his cheery laugh, which filled the Blue Room with infectious good nature. "Homeric laughter" Hay says it sometimes was; adding this genial touch, that it was "dull pleasure" to Lincoln "to laugh alone." In young Hay he had always at hand, to share his enjoyment of an amusing story from life, or from one of the humorous books of the day, a keenly sympathetic audience. I like to think of the tired President stealing into the young secretary's room, late at night, sitting on the edge of the bed, and reading aloud some good joke of war-time.

Some visitors at the White House

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

were filled with wonder at the quick transition from unbridled mirth to pathetic seriousness. What wonder that “the boisterous laughter became less frequent year by year, the eye grew veiled by constant meditation on momentous subjects ; the air of reserve and detachment from his surroundings increased,” and, as Hay says, and his pictures and the two contrasting life-masks show, he rapidly grew old.

Lincoln’s sense of humor, which flavored now and then his speeches and writings, and constantly his conversation, went along with a homely wit which frequently brought to his argument quaint and convincing illustration. His sense of humor was, indeed, a real assistance in his leadership, having many uses : it relieved the strain of his strenuous labors ; it helped to attach the masses to his per-

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

sonality ; and it assisted him out of many difficulties. We did not fully know till lately that he himself so keenly appreciated the part that story-telling played in his career. Colonel Burt reports a strange interview with Lincoln at the Soldiers' Home at a time of keen anxiety and when a person present had rudely demanded one of his "good stories." "I believe," said Lincoln, turning away from the challenger, "I have the popular reputation of being a story-teller, but I do not deserve the name in its general sense ; for it is not the story itself, but its purpose, or effect, that interests me. I often avoid a long and useless discussion by others, or a laborious explanation on my own part, by a short story that illustrates my point of view. So, too, the sharpness of a refusal or the edge of a rebuke may be blunted by an appropri-

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

ate story, so as to save wounded feeling and yet serve the purpose. No, I am not simply a story-teller, but story-telling as an emollient saves me much friction and distress."

### IV

The most striking characteristic of Lincoln's style may be found in the record from the beginning. Candor was a trait of the man, and not less of his verbal manner. His natural honesty of character, his desire to make his meaning clear,—literally to *demonstrate* what he believed to be the truth, with mathematical precision,—this gave his expression both attractiveness and force. The simplicity of his nature, his lack of self-consciousness and vanity, tended to simplicity and directness of diction. An eminent lawyer has said,—is it with ex-

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

aggeration? — that without the massive reasoning of Webster, or the resplendent rhetoric of Burke, Lincoln exceeded them both in his faculty of statement. His style was affected, too, by the personal traits of consideration for those of a contrary mind, by his toleration, and his large human sympathy.

But Lincoln's style might have had all these qualities, and yet not have carried as it did. Beyond these traits comes the miracle — the cadence of his prose, and its traits of pathos and of imagination. Lincoln's prose, at its height, and when his spirit was stirred by aspiration and resolve, affects the soul like noble music. Indeed, there may be found in all his great utterances a strain which is like the leading motive — the *Leitmotif* — in musical drama; a strain of mingled pathos, heroism, and resolution. That is

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

the strain in the two inaugurals, in the "Gettysburg Address," and in his letter of consolation to a bereaved mother, which moves the hearts of generation after generation.<sup>1</sup>

Lincoln's power of expression was evidently one of the most effective elements of his leadership. The sympathy and toleration which made his writings and speeches so persuasive assisted his leadership, not only in convincing his listeners, and in endearing him, the leader, to individuals and the masses, but helped him as a statesman to take large and humane views, and to adopt measures in keeping with such views. To that sympathy and that toleration a reunited country is under constant obligation; for Lincoln not only brought the war to a successful issue,—

<sup>1</sup> See "Lincoln's Genius for Expression," in this volume.

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

successful in the true interests of both antagonists,—but to him we owe the continuing possibility of good feeling between the sections. To think that in the preparatory political struggle and during the four years of the hideous conflict, Abraham Lincoln, though his spirit was strained almost beyond human endurance by the harassments of his position; though misunderstood and foully calumniated by public antagonists, and thwarted and plotted against by some of his own apparent supporters, uttered not one word of violence or rancor—not a phrase which, after the cessation of hostilities, might return to embitter the defeated combatants, or be resented by their descendants!

This extraordinary forbearance of the President's has often been spoken of as an amiable trait of the man; but do we fully

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

realize the value to the nation of this trait, and the worth of its example in public leadership? After so tremendous a conflict, the world abroad wonders at the quickness of the return to sympathetic relations,—to closer relations than ever,—between the sections so lately at war. But we of the country know that the obstacles to true union after the war were not so much the events of the war,—though some of these naturally enough left a trail of bitter resentment,—as events succeeding the conflict of years, in that period of experimental reconstruction when things were done in the name of the dominant powers which the South has found it hard to forget, and the North ardently wishes could be blotted from remembrance. Lincoln's attitude toward the South, when fully comprehended, helped to obliterate the acid stains of the

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

reconstruction period. In other words, we are to-day a truly united country, not only because Lincoln conducted the war so as to win military success, but because of his wise and tolerant and sympathetic leadership during that war.

A striking illustration of his sympathy for the people of the Confederate States was his attempt, earnest and ineffectual, in the last days of hostilities, two months before his death, to convert his own cabinet to his generous and long-cherished scheme of compensated emancipation. That he failed pathetically to carry through this plan, upon which his heart was set, illustrates, also, the fact that uninterrupted success is not necessary to the fame of the great figures of history. Lincoln's failure to win support for this humane policy deeply grieved him, but the misadventure is not held against him

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

in the estimate of his greatness. On the contrary, the fact that he made the attempt counts in his favor, and to-day especially endears him to multitudes of his countrymen, and is one of the very bonds that hold the country together.

But Lincoln's sympathy and tolerance, his forgiveness, his distaste for personal contention, his lack of resentment, his great heart, were shown not only in his attitude toward those whom—for their own good, as he believed—he unrelentingly opposed with all the forces at his command; but also toward his political opponents in the North, and toward those among his nominal supporters whose zeal led them into positions of open or concealed antagonism. The opposition to him in his own party was much more intense than is generally known to the present generation.

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

### v

As to his masterly management of the personalities whose followers he placated and whose peculiarities and adverse abilities he skilfully utilized for the common cause, this part of his leadership is illustrated by a hundred stories either true in fact or typically true. Here came into play his sense of humor, his insight into motive and character, in a word, his tact, along with that tolerance and that sympathy of which I have spoken as affecting his habit of oral and written expression. That he could manage to hold so long together four such individualities as his own, Seward's, Stanton's, and Chase's, proves a genius of leadership truly exceptional. It is now known, as it was not till Nicolay and Hay revealed the fact, how Seward learned to respect

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

and loyally acquiesce in the leadership of one whom he at first not unnaturally expected to lead. Lincoln's leadership of the irascible and useful Stanton was a simpler matter; here the President's inexhaustible patience and his abounding sense of humor were both required to save the situation, though, looking back on the relations of these strong and utterly divergent personalities, one feels that the sense of humor was perhaps the saving grace. As for Chase, and his convinced and enthusiastic following, it was inevitable that some such rallying-ground should exist, in a time of stress, for those who, as in the case of Chase himself, were temperamentally unsympathetic with the personality and methods of Lincoln. But Lincoln's leadership did not fail him here, as the story of the second nomination and election abundantly testifies.

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

In Lincoln's history we see the growth of self-confidence in a man who knows his ignorances and limitations, but who, from time to time measuring himself with other men in the struggle of life, gradually learns his own abilities and realizes his own strength. With such an experience the time comes when one who has missed the learning of the schools, or who is new in some special field into which he has been thrust, confides in his own vision, makes, if slowly, still with assurance, his own decisions, and is willing to shoulder responsibilities no matter how weighty. A letter remarkable for its anticipation of the favorable opinion of the people as well as of the verdict of history, was written from the White House by John Hay to John G. Nicolay, in the very midst of the war — with two years of fighting behind, and two years to come.

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

It contains a vivid picture of Lincoln, calm and confident at the helm. Not here the sad-eyed, perplexed President, who would "never be glad any more," — not the future, aureoled martyr, — but the masterful executive : —

The Tycoon is in fine whack. I have rarely seen him more serene and busy. He is managing this war, the draft, foreign relations, and planning a reconstruction of the Union, all at once. I never knew with what tyrannous authority he rules the Cabinet, till now. The most important things he decides and there is no cavil. I am growing more and more firmly convinced that the good of the country absolutely demands that he should be kept where he is till this thing is over. There is no man in the country so wise, so gentle and so firm.

### VI

Let it not be omitted in the enumeration of the elements of Lincoln's leader-

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

ship, that he did not disdain to learn from experience. In his First Inaugural, while stating the policy of the Administration with regard to acts of violence against the authority of the United States, he definitely announced that the course indicated would be followed "unless current events and experience" should "show a modification or change to be proper," and that in every case and exigency his best discretion would be exercised "according to circumstances actually existing." Lincoln, like other great leaders and administrators, would rather be right than consistent. His was a consistency of principle rather than of program. His aim was justice, and if he could not reach it by one path, he would push on by another.

Special features of his leadership were the knowledge and skill of the long-practiced lawyer, which helped him im-

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

measurably in his executive decisions, as Frederick Trevor Hill has clearly pointed out; and his quickly and almost instinctively acquired skill in military strategy. His letters to generals in the field are those of a master of strategy who should use the symbolism of *Æsop* and the irony of Socrates. Says the foremost living military critic of America, General Francis V. Greene:—

Great statesman, astute politician, clear thinker, classic writer, master of men, kindly, lovable man. These are his titles. To them must be added — military leader. Had he failed in that quality, the others would have been forgotten. Had peace been made on any terms but those of surrender of the insurgent forces and restoration of the Union, his career would have been a colossal failure and the Emancipation Proclamation a subject of ridicule. The prime essential was military success.

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

Lincoln gained it. Judged in the retrospect of nearly half a century, with his every written word now in print and with all the facts of the period brought out and placed in proper perspective by the endless studies, discussions, and arguments of the intervening years, it becomes clear that first and last and at all times during his Presidency, in military affairs his was not only the guiding but the controlling hand.<sup>1</sup>

An intensely important feature of Lincoln's leadership would be omitted if nothing were said of the effect upon his thought and conduct of his belief in and conscious communion with an almighty, mysterious, and beneficent Power, concerning itself not less with human affairs than with the march of seasons and the sweep of constellations. The deity was to him an ever-present, ever-regnant influence. There was nothing of theology

<sup>1</sup> *Scribner's Monthly*, July, 1900.

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

or dogmatism in his religious opinions ; but he lived in the spirit. The strange silence of the Almighty Sovereign perplexed him ; and he sought with passionate eagerness to read the decrees of Providence in the unfoldings of events, sometimes taking definite action in accordance with his interpretation of divine indications. And always the belief in God was to him a challenge to singleness of purpose : to the All Pure he lifted clean hands and a pure heart.

Lincoln the Leader possessed sterner and higher traits than those to which I first called attention. He had the lofty qualities of spiritual insight, of moral conviction, of solemn resolution, of undying courage, of complete devotion, and of faith and hope unfailing. He saw deeply, he felt intensely, he spoke at times with the voice of a poet-prophet.

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

Fate—or is it some world spirit of comedy?—plays strange pranks with human affairs now and then, and nothing more singular ever happened in history, or was invented in romance, than the giving of imperial powers, the destiny of a race, the leadership of a nation, the keys of life and death, to a sad-eyed, laughter-loving, story-telling, shrewd, unlettered, big-hearted frontiersman—the one great humorist among all the rulers of earth.

Leader always he was, from the day when he, a youth, commanded a grotesque company of motleys in an Indian frontier campaign, to the time when at Washington he led public opinion in a field as wide as the world; controlled the movements of fleets and armies; and held in his strong hands the lives of hundreds of thousands of men.

That inordinately tall countryman,

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

with a shawl thrown over his gaunt figure, crossing alone the little park between the White House and the War Department, if appealed to by some distressed private soldier or citizen could order justice done by a written sentence as surely as could any Asiatic autocrat by issued edict. While he often yielded to the dictates of his pitying heart in individual cases, and showed constantly almost abnormal patience, those who mistook his charity for weakness were liable to sudden enlightenment. Colonel Hay once saw the long-suffering Lincoln take an office-seeker by the coat-collar, carry him bodily to the door, and throw him in a helpless heap outside. His, indeed, was a “gentle but firm and certain hand.”<sup>1</sup>

And here is the wonder ; this merciful

<sup>1</sup> See Lincoln’s military program, July 23, 1861.

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

man, daily saving the lives of deserters so as not to increase a melancholy list of widows and orphans ; this tender-souled, agonizing, consecrated leader, looking out upon confronting armies and a suffering people, was as stern as fate in demanding that battle should be made, and war, with all its horrors, resolutely continued, till right should be accomplished and eternal justice done. Here is the true leader, as gentle and affectionate as any woman and as averse to violence, yet able to meet with unflinching spirit the inevitable duty of the sword-bearer !

### VII

The great test of Lincoln's leadership came in his dealing with the fundamental question of slavery as related to the compact of the States, the perpetuity of the Union, the very existence of the nation.

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

The important part of his political career before the war had to do with this complex question. This double problem made the war itself, and was dominant throughout its course. As he called it, the “perplexing compound,—Union and slavery,” had become indeed a “question not of two sides merely, but of at least four sides,” even among those who were for the Union, saying nothing of those who were against it.

“There were,” he said, “those who were for the Union with, but not without slavery,—those for it without, but not with ; those for it with or without, but who preferred it with ; and those for it with or without, but who preferred it without.” Here was the maze through which he must needs find his way ; these were the conditions from which he was to work out salvation for the nation, with

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

the profound conviction that whether slavery was or was not immediately extinguished, its death-warrant was already signed. Lincoln's view of slavery was, from the first, not unlike Washington's and that of other founders of the Republic. His attitude was unyielding as to principle. He looked upon the institution as intrinsically evil: inimical to the interests of free labor; anomalous, and impossible of perpetuity, in a politically free community; something to be thwarted, diminished, and ultimately made to cease, by just, constitutional, and reasonable means. He satisfied the extremists on neither side of the great debate; for while he would never compromise as to principle, he was too profoundly the statesman to refuse to compromise as to details of time and method.

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

Lincoln the Leader, in dealing with the chief perplexity of the situation,—this complex question of slavery and the Union,—was helped by his own intensely human make-up. The traits common to all mankind were in him strongly developed. He was in close touch with his kind ; he sympathized with men on the plane of humanity, and regarded them in the spirit of philosophy. He was called a great joker ; but Lincoln's "seeing" of "the joke" meant more than with ordinary minds ; it meant, frequently enough, that he saw through pretension and falsity ; while the jokes that he told often had the wisdom of the ancient parables.

Lincoln's democracy was a matter as much of instinct as of reason. He comprehended human motives, human prejudices, littleness, and nobilities. It was he

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

who once described honest statesmanship as the employment of individual meannesses for the public good. Acquainted with humanity, he knew how to bear with its infirmities, and he moved toward his inflexible purpose, over what to others would have been heart-breaking obstacles, with a long-suffering patience that had in it something of the divine.

As memoir after memoir of the wartime has come to light, his countrymen year by year have been better able to obtain a knowledge of the workings of Lincoln's mind, and the marvelous skill and wisdom of his leadership at the time of the opening debates; pending the Presidential campaign; and during the Presidency itself. That which his chief biographers long ago declared of him, we now more certainly know to be the truth; namely, that, "with the fire of a reformer

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

and a martyr in his heart, he yet proceeded by the ways of cautious and practical statecraft."

Descended upon him from the North delegations of abolitionists to tell him that unless he at once freed the slaves his administration would be shorn of moral support, and the war would end in failure and disgrace. Hastened to the White House from the Border States their governors and congressional representatives to warn him that, if he touched slavery, they could not keep their constituencies on the side of the Union; and the Border States, he knew, held the balance of power. Hurried back from Spain Carl Schurz,—that gallant figure, a contribution of the best of the Old World to the service of the New in its hour of need,—hurried Carl Schurz from his post at the Spanish court to in-

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

form the President that, according to his belief, there would be great danger of the recognition of the Confederacy unless there were prompt military success, or some proof that the war would destroy slavery; while other warnings from over the sea were to the effect that if the President should stir up the slaves against their masters, the sympathy of European friends of the North would be justly forfeited.

Through all this divergence of counsel Lincoln watched, waited, prayed, and incessantly worked toward the end which his own judgment, his own heart approved. It was, as I have said, a highly important element of his leadership that he had had the training of a lawyer, by a practice of many years and many kinds. His knowledge of men had thus been greatly increased; while his grasp of legal princi-

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

ples was of vast help when his talents and experience were called upon in a mighty conflict. It was no petty construction of legal obligation that made him strenuous as to the literal fulfilment of his oath to execute faithfully the office of President, and preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States. He found no constitutional authority to emancipate the slaves except as a military necessity, and he stedfastly refused to free the slaves till with an honest mind he could declare that the necessity had arisen, knowing, then, also, that the time had at last arrived when public opinion would sustain his action.

In his famous letter to Greeley, in 1862, he stated his position and explained his policy with absolute lucidity. "If I could save the Union without freeing any slave, I would do it; and if I could save it by

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

freeing all the slaves, I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would also do that." Like statements were made to others in formal and informal utterances, and he explained to impatient critics and counselors that the condition of public opinion would not justify the course they demanded.

But the deep lesson of his leadership lies in the fact that while year after year he carefully studied public opinion,—that supreme element in all matters of government and all the affairs of men,—he studied it not to yield to it as his master, but in order so to act in respect to it as to accomplish his own well-considered purpose; to act upon it; to bring it powerfully to the help of his cherished plans; in a word to lead it, and to lead it right.

What is true leadership of the people?

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

Is it to be carried away by a popular wave; to avoid opposing it, not in order to circumvent it,—to save one's strength for its later direction,—but solely and selfishly to avoid being submerged by it? Is it to change when it changes, in order to retain place and the semblance of power? Is he truly a leader who listens to "the sacred voice of the people," in order to learn which way to leap? Not thus Lincoln. His was not the leadership that, in order to be popular, changes its mind, but a leadership that changes the minds of others. He kept "near the people,"—he kept his "ear to the ground,"—through his sympathy with human beings and his interest in them, in order to learn the moods of many minds, and gradually to lead thought and action in the line of his own profound convictions. Lincoln respected public opinion,—he

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

declared that “public opinion in this country is everything,”<sup>1</sup> — but he was not opinion’s trembling slave. He understood human prejudices, limitations, the effects of heredity and environment; but he never considered a wrong public opinion final. Not unknown to mankind is the statesmanship that resists public opinion when it disapproves of it — resists till the waves beat threateningly, and then turns with the tide. This is the statesmanship of Pontius Pilate — that hesitant and tragic figure who stands before the eyes of all mankind, washing ineffectually his guilty hands, while he releases Barabbas and sends the Christ to Calvary.

No book praising Lincoln has lately been issued which has brought to me a clearer idea of his method with public

<sup>1</sup> In his Columbus speech, September 16, 1859.

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

opinion, as well as his wisdom and his self-sacrificing devotion, than one by a man whose life was a romance of devotion to ideals,—a Southern-born abolitionist,—who did not hesitate to dispraise the President. He was opposed to war, and held that “no drop of blood would have been shed if the President,” at the beginning, “had proclaimed freedom for every slave.” Yet even he would have protected the centers to which the slaves would flee —as if that itself would not have been an open invitation to war! In 1862, he, the Rev. Moncure D. Conway, went to the White House with the Rev. W. H. Channing, to urge personally upon the President the emancipation of the slaves. Pathetic was the sweet reasonableness of the President in explaining to these good and insistent men, as he had so often done to men of like

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

scruples and beliefs, not only his own great desire for emancipation, preferably with compensation, but the fact that perhaps they did not know so well as he the temper of the entire public. He showed them that those who were working in the antislavery movement would naturally come in contact with men of like mind, and might easily overestimate the number of those who held similar views. He gave it as his observation that the great masses of the people at that time cared comparatively little about the Negro. And at the end of the interview he said,—can we not hear him say it?—“We shall need all the antislavery feeling in the country, and more; you can go home and try to bring the people to your views; and you may say anything you like about me, if that will help. Don’t spare me.”

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

“Don’t spare me!” In the pathetic humorousness of that cry comes sharply to mind one of the most effective equipments of Lincoln for the performance of difficult duties,—an equipment which he shared with Washington, and which each possessed in a conspicuous degree,—the tremendously powerful quality of disinterestedness. It was tact, that is, intelligence added to kindness, which helped make Washington a successful leader; it was tact which helped Lincoln to steer his Administration between the rocks of selfishness and faction — but without purity of purpose, without absolute disinterestedness, neither could have carried so well the part assigned.

Do we grasp all the bearings of his strange situation? He who is known now as the Great Emancipator set before him as the one indispensable aim, not the im-

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

mediate freedom of the slave, but the immediate salvation of the Union,—the integrity of the nation,—though when the time came for emancipation to assist Union, how joyfully and confidently he seized upon emancipation! With what courage, and in the face of what heavy risks! In many thoughtful minds the fact that Lincoln's policy was the Union first, and abolition next, remains his highest title to world-wide fame—his saving of the nation the gigantic feat that lifts him to the companionship of the most momentous characters of universal history. "This Union," says John Coleman Adams, "is the consummation of all the struggles of all men toward a state of universal peace. It is the life and aspiration of the world organized into a nation." The threat to undo the Union was a "peril to mankind." That Lincoln in-

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

stinctively felt this, and strained every nerve to the supreme task of preserving the nation, and this with success, gives him rank among the greatest. That he did this, and destroyed slavery also, proves his genius and doubly crowns his stupendous accomplishment.

He did all this, so far as we may attribute to any single person the shaping of affairs so tremendous,—though in this case the personal preponderance is exceptionally evident,—he did all this, and he assumed no virtue for having done it; not a thought of vanity or undue exultation ever crossed his candid mind. To a lesser nature such temptation would have been great as, at the last, success followed success, remembering the reproaches he had so long silently borne, and, most trying of all, the suspicion and spiritual scorn—the look

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

from above downward — of those who, working for the same ends, regarded him as less sensitive morally and less faithful to that cause to which he had dedicated every energy of his soul.

Read again the thrilling chapters of the Nicolay and Hay life which deal with emancipation. I say thrilling, because I believe that no intelligent student of history — especially no patriotic American of any party or locality — can read these pages without emotion. Has the mental history of a single sublime and world-approved act ever before been so minutely and authoritatively described? Here no quality fails of illustration that helped to make Lincoln one of the ablest as well as one of the noblest of men.

It was the task of Lincoln, in issuing his preliminary and his final “edicts of

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

freedom," to perform an executive act which, while warranted by military necessity, should be based upon enduring principle, and so be effective upon the present and the ultimate public opinion of America and mankind. He must thus effect immediate results ; he must thus do what might be done to insure in permanence the fruits of success in the controversy of arms. Say his historians: "Grand as was the historical act of signing his decree of liberation, it was but an incident in the grander contest he was commissioned and resolved to maintain."

It is pleasant to know that this kindly, much-burdened, and harassed ruler had at least for a few days before his taking-off the satisfactions of full success. He who knew more than any other the awful dangers,—as Godkin said while Lincoln still was living,—was perhaps the

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

only man in the North who had “never wavered, or doubted, or abated one jot of heart or hope.” He had “been always calm, confident, determined; the very type and embodiment of the national will, the true and fit representative of the people in its noblest mood”; the ideal “leader of a democracy.” Said lately one who knew him, and who confesses that it has taken years of reflection and retrospective consideration to become convinced that, in the matter of the proclamation as a war measure, Lincoln was right and he was wrong: “Through the ages to come, the history of the Union and freedom under the Union will hold up to the admiration of mankind, as the greatest saving influence in our greatest danger, the character, the firmness, the homely sayings, the freedom from passion, the singular common-sense,

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

the almost divine charity, of Abraham Lincoln.”<sup>1</sup>

### VIII

In these times of new conditions, new advantages, and new dangers,—in every community of our country, and in the national field,—the cry to-day is for leaders. Nor are we without them: some long-known and well-beloved; some just emerging into prominence, and being tried by the first tests of responsibility. Some are leaders in the best sense, and to some we may be inclined to apply the name not of leaders, but of misleaders. It would be absurd to be looking now here, now there for “another Lincoln,” for a reincarnation of that rich and most individual personality — one of the most fascinating the world has

<sup>1</sup> George H. Yeaman.

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

ever known. We shall not see again that extraordinary combination of sympathetic qualities with the sterner virtues; such rare gifts and abilities; that balance of ambition with self-effacement, of confidence with modesty, of firmness with tenderness, of decision with deference; such sense of humor; such mixture of buoyancy of spirit with moods of gloom; such tendency toward contemplation, and such power of action, all united in one character. It would be unfortunate, moreover, to judge present-day executives and leaders by comparing their opinions and acts in detail with those which were characteristic of entirely different men and conditions. We are living in a very different world from that of the middle of the nineteenth century. For one thing, the relation of public men to the merit system in public office is not

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

that of the days of the Civil War ; and many questions are now pressing which were only faintly foreshadowed half a century ago.

But the fundamental principles of Lincoln's leadership are not outgrown. We have the right to demand in our leaders equal sincerity, disinterestedness, and devotion. We have a right to point, as a perpetual standard, to his moderation ; to his conscientious consideration of all interests and views ; to his wise and patient tolerance and open-mindedness ; to his freedom from rancor, and avoidance of personal contention ; to his moral courage ; to his sense of justice ; to his essential democracy. We may well ask of our leaders that they should imitate his manly attitude toward public opinion ; that they should disdain to injure its sources by violent and unproved asser-

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

tions, and by the forced uses of our modern enginery of publicity. We may well insist that they should not meanly follow, nor falsely and selfishly mold, the sentiment of voters; but shape aright and direct to no ignoble ends the opinions and the suffrages of the people. We have a right to resent leadership based either upon conscienceless advocacy of supposedly popular programs, or, still more shameless, upon the wholesale use of money. It is our duty to warn against the spurious leadership that deals in indiscriminate denunciation, awakens a feeling of class and of class hatred, forgets the bonds of a common citizenship, spreads distrust and despisal of government, and sows the very seeds of anarchy and assassination. We have a right to scout the demagogues who take the name of Lincoln upon their lips, yet in their lives, and in their parody

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

of leadership, set at naught every principle of his nature. Despicable, too, is the leadership quick to serve moneyed interests while it ignores the interests and welfare of the masses of the people.

Our needs, our conditions, are different, but the principles of justice and of human liberty are the same, now and forever. In the recurring and necessary readjustment of laws and methods in the related realms of industry, of economics, and of government, let us demand the respect for rights, the acknowledgment of mutual duties, the striving for justice, the understanding of humanity, and the love of fellow men which make Lincoln's leadership, like the leadership of Washington, the standard of a patriotism broader than the confines of commonwealths, and fit for emulation and guidance throughout all the centuries of earth.

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

### IX

Let me close with the memory of a night of the spring of the year 1865, in the time of the blooming of lilacs, as says the wonderful poem. I was waiting in Philadelphia for Lincoln's funeral train to start, as it was my duty to accompany it to Newark. I had and have little desire to look upon faces from which the light of life is departed ; but suddenly it came upon me that I had never seen the great President, and must not let go by this last opportunity to behold at least the deserted temple of a lofty soul. To my grief I found it was too late ; the police had drawn their line across the path in front of Independence Hall. But my earnest desire prevailed, and I was the last to pass in by the window and behold, in a sudden dazzle of lights and

## LINCOLN THE LEADER

flowers, the still features of that face we all now know so well. There lay the martyred Lincoln, dead on that very spot where, four years before, he had consecrated himself to assassination, rather than that he should be unfaithful to the principles of liberty which, from that sacred chamber,—now doubly sacred,—were given to the world. Soon I went my way into the night and walked alone northward to the distant station, hearing behind me the wailing music of the funeral dirge. The procession approached ; the funeral train moved out beneath the stars. Never shall I forget the groups of weeping men and women at the little towns through which we slowly passed, and the stricken faces of the thousands who, in the cities, stood like mourners at the funeral of a beloved father. Thus, as came the dawn and the full day, through grieving

## **LINCOLN THE LEADER**

States was borne the body of the beloved chieftain, while the luminous spirit and example of Lincoln, the Leader of the People, went forth into all the earth along the pathway of eternal fame.

# **LINCOLN'S GENIUS FOR EXPRESSION**

The supreme soul of an immortal day.

## LINCOLN'S GENIUS FOR EXPRESSION

### I

Of style, in the ordinary use of the word, Lincoln may be said to have been innocent. He certainly did not strive for an artistic method of expression through such imitation of the masters, for instance, as Robert Louis Stevenson's. There was nothing ambitiously elaborate or self-consciously simple in Lincoln's way of writing. He had not the scholar's range of words. He was not always grammatically accurate. He would doubtless have been very much surprised if any one had told him that he had a "style" at all. And yet, because he was determined to be understood, because

## GENIUS FOR EXPRESSION

he was honest, because he had a warm and true heart, because he had read good books eagerly and not coldly, and because there was in him a native taste, as well as a strain of imagination, and an inborn sense of the beautiful in English prose,—its proper flow and rhythm,—he achieved a singularly clear and forcible style, which took color from his own noble character, and became a thing individual and distinguished.

He was, indeed, extremely modest about his accomplishments. His great desire was to convince those whom he addressed, and if he could do this,—if he could make his views clear to them, still more if he could make them appear reasonable,—he was satisfied. In one of his speeches in the great debate with Douglas he said: “Gentlemen, Judge

## GENIUS FOR EXPRESSION

Douglas informed you that this speech of mine was probably carefully prepared. I admit that it was. I am not a master of language; I have not a fine education; I am not capable of entering into a disquisition upon dialectics, as I believe you call it; but I do not believe the language I employed bears any such construction as Judge Douglas puts upon it. But I don't care about a quibble in regard to words. I know what I meant, and I will not leave this crowd in doubt, if I can explain it to them, what I really meant in the use of that paragraph."

Who are, to Americans at least, the two most interesting men of action of the nineteenth century? Why not Napoleon and Lincoln? No two men could have been more radically different in many ways; but they were both great rulers,

## GENIUS FOR EXPRESSION

one according to the “good old plan” of might, the other by the good new plan of right: autocrat—democrat. They were alike in this—that both were intensely interesting personalities; both were moved by imagination; and both acquired remarkable power of expression. One used this power to carry out his own sometimes wise, sometimes purely selfish, purposes—to deceive and to dominate; the other for the expression of truth and the persuasion of his fellow men.

Napoleon’s literary art was the making of phrases which pierced like a Corsican knife or tingled the blood like the call of a trumpet. His words go to the mark like a stroke of lightning. When he speaks, it is as if an earthquake had passed under one’s feet.

Lincoln’s style is, in general, very dif-

## GENIUS FOR EXPRESSION

ferent; heroic, appealing, gracious or humorous, it does not so much startle as melt the heart — though his honest indignation sometimes gave birth to a phrase of stern and prophetic menace. These men were alike in this—that they learned to express themselves by dint of long practice, and both in youth wrote much nonsense. Napoleon in his young days wrote romance and history; Lincoln wrote verse and composed speeches. Napoleon failed as a literary man; Lincoln certainly did not make any great success as a lyceum lecturer; in fact, his style was at its best only when his whole heart was enlisted.

### II

Lincoln's style, at its best, is characterized by great simplicity and directness, which in themselves are artistic

## GENIUS FOR EXPRESSION

qualities. In addition there is an agreeable cadence, not overdone except in one curious instance,— a passage of the Second Inaugural,— where it deflects into poetic measure and rhyme: “ Fondly do we hope— fervently do we pray— that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away.” This does not spoil, but it somewhat injures, one of the most memorable of his writings.

Then there is in Lincoln, at times, a quaintness, a homeliness and humor of illustration, along with a most engaging frankness and intellectual honesty. The reader has both an intellectual and moral satisfaction in the clearness and fairness of the statement. All this affects agreeably the literary form, and helps to give Lincoln’s style at times the charm of imaginative utterance; for imagination in literature is, essentially, the faculty of

## GENIUS FOR EXPRESSION

seeing clearly and the art of stating clearly the actual reality. There was nothing of fancy or invention in Lincoln's imagination; his was the imagination that is implied in a strong realization of the truth of things in the mind of the writer or speaker; the actual imaged in the mind.

When these letters and speeches of Lincoln were appearing in the papers as part of the news of the day, I wonder how many of us who were then living appreciated them from the literary point of view. I remember that at a certain period, some time after the war, I seemed for the first time to awake fully to the attraction of Lincoln's style. Beginning with the speech at Gettysburg, I reread many of his writings, and felt everywhere his genius for expression.

Where and how did Lincoln gain this

## GENIUS FOR EXPRESSION

mastery of expression? He said of himself: "The aggregate of all his schooling did not amount to one year. He was never in a college or academy as a student. . . . What he has in the way of education he has picked up. After he was twenty-three and had separated from his father, he studied English grammar—imperfectly, of course, but so as to speak and write as well as he now does. He studied and nearly mastered the six books of Euclid since he was a member of Congress. He regrets his want of education and does what he can to supply the want."

As a boy at home we are told that he would write, and do sums in arithmetic, on the wooden shovel by the fireside, shaving off the used surface and beginning again. At nineteen it is recorded that he "had read every book he could

## GENIUS FOR EXPRESSION

find, and could spell down the whole country.” He read early the Bible, “Æsop’s Fables,” “Robinson Crusoe,” “Pilgrim’s Progress,” a history of the United States, Weems’s “Life of Washington,” Franklin’s “Autobiography”; later, the life of Clay and the works of Burns and Shakespeare. Not a bad list of books, if taken seriously and not mixed with trash; for, of course, culture has to do not so much with the extent of the information as with the depth of the impression.

The youthful Lincoln pondered also over the Revised Statutes of Indiana; and “he would sit in the twilight and read a dictionary as long as he could see.” John Hanks said: “When Abe and I returned to the house from work, he would go to the cupboard, snatch a piece of corn-bread, take down a book,

## GENIUS FOR EXPRESSION

sit down, cock his legs up as high as his head, and read."

At twenty-four, when he was supposed to be keeping a shop, Nicolay and Hay speak of the "grotesque youth habited in homespun tow, lying on his back, with his feet on the trunk of the tree, and poring over his books by the hour, grinding around with the shade as it shifted from north to east."

We know that Lincoln did not read Plutarch's Lives till during the Presidential campaign of 1860,—then in order to make true, before it was issued, a statement in a campaign biography prepared with his assistance. How early he had read anything of Emerson's we may infer from the fact that when the two greatest Americans of their time met in Washington, during the war, Lincoln quoted to Emerson a remark about Ken-

## GENIUS FOR EXPRESSION

tuckians which occurred in a lecture of Emerson's given in New York in the year 1843, and reported in the "Weekly Tribune."

The youth not only read and thought, but wrote, among other things, nonsensical or sentimental verses ; and he composed speeches. He went early into politics, and soon became a thoughtful and effective speaker and debater. Of the language that Lincoln heard and used in boyhood, says Nicolay, in an essay on "Lincoln's Literary Experiments," printed since the "Life" was issued, "though the vocabulary was scanty, the words were short and forcible." He learned among men and women poor and inured to hardship how the plain people think and feel, and he addressed himself to their understanding.

In his young manhood at Springfield

## GENIUS FOR EXPRESSION

he measured wits with other bright young lawyers, in plain and direct language before plain and simple-minded auditors, either in political discussion or in the court-room ; either in the capital or in the country towns of Illinois. His mathematical and legal studies were an aid to precise statement, and his native honesty made him frank and convincing in argument.

Lincoln felt himself to be a poor defender of a guilty client, and sometimes avoided the job. If for a brief period in his youth he indulged in anything resembling the spread-eagle style of oratory, he was quick, as Nicolay declares, to realize the danger and overcome the temptation.

## GENIUS FOR EXPRESSION

### III

By practice in extemporary speaking Lincoln learned to do a most difficult thing—namely, to produce literature on his legs. It is difficult thus to produce literature, because the words must flow with immediate precision. It is unusual for a politician to go through life always addressing audiences, and yet always avoiding the orator's temptation to please and captivate by extravagant and false sentiment and statement. The writer—and particularly the political writer—is tempted to this sort of immorality, but still more the speaker, for with the latter the reward of applause is prompt and seductive. It is amazing to look over Lincoln's record and find how seldom he went beyond bounds, how fair and just he was, how responsible and con-

## GENIUS FOR EXPRESSION

scientious his utterances long before these utterances became of national importance. Yet it was largely because of this very quality that they assumed national importance. And, then, both his imagination and his sympathy helped him here, for while he keenly saw and felt his own side of the argument, he could see as clearly, and he could sympathetically understand, the side of his opponent.

Lincoln was barely twenty-three when, as a candidate for the legislature, he issued a formal address to the people of Sangamon County. It is the first paper preserved by Nicolay and Hay in their collection of his addresses and letters. Nicolay well says that "as a literary production no ordinary college graduate would need to be ashamed of it."

In this address we already find that honest purpose, that "sweet reasonable-

## GENIUS FOR EXPRESSION

ness" and persuasiveness of speech, which is characteristic of his later and more celebrated utterances. In his gathered writings and addresses we find, indeed, touches of the true Lincoln genius here and there from the age of twenty-three on. In the literary record of about his thirty-third year occur some of the most surprising proofs of the delicacy of his nature—of that culture of the soul which had taken place in him in the midst of such harsh and unpromising environment. I refer to the letters written to his young friend Joshua F. Speed, a member of the Kentucky family associated by marriage with the family of the poet Keats.

In Lincoln's early serious verse the feeling is right, though the art is lacking; but the verses are interesting in that they show a good ear. Note has been

## GENIUS FOR EXPRESSION

made of a pleasing cadence in Lincoln's prose; and it is not strange that he should show a rhythmical sense in his verse. We learn from those who knew him best in later life that he was an ardent lover and frequent reader of poetry —especially of Shakespeare. In the home circle he would recite favorite poems, like those of Hood.

### IV

By the time he was thirty-nine years of age Lincoln was an accomplished orator. His speech in Congress on the 28th of January, 1848, on the Mexican War, strikes the note of solemn verity and of noble indignation which a little later rang through the country, and, with other voices, aroused it to a sense of impending danger.

It was in 1851 that he wrote some

## GENIUS FOR EXPRESSION

family letters that not only show him in a charming light as the true and wise friend of his shiftless step-brother, but as the affectionate guardian of his step-mother, who had been such a good mother to him. There is something Greek in the clear phrase and pure reason of these epistles:—

“ DEAR BROTHER:—When I came into Charleston day before yesterday, I learned that you are anxious to sell the land where you live and move to Missouri. I have been thinking of this ever since, and cannot but think such a notion is utterly foolish. What can you do in Missouri better than here? Is the land any richer? Can you there, any more than here, raise corn and wheat and oats without work? Will anybody there, any more than here, do your work for you?

## GENIUS FOR EXPRESSION

If you intend to go to work, there is no better place than right where you are; if you do not intend to go to work, you cannot get along anywhere. Squirming and crawling about from place to place can do no good. You have raised no crop this year; and what you really want is to sell the land, get the money, and spend it. Part with the land you have, and, my life upon it, you will never after own a spot big enough to bury you in."

We find in his Peoria speech of 1854 a statement of his long contention against the extension of slavery, and a proof of his ability to cope intellectually with the ablest debaters of the West. His Peoria speech was in answer to Judge Douglas, with whom four years afterward he held the far-resounding debate. Lincoln was now forty-five years old, and his oratory

## GENIUS FOR EXPRESSION

contains that moral impetus which was to give it greater and greater power.

In 1856 occurred the Frémont and Dayton campaign, which came not very far from being the Frémont and Lincoln campaign. In a speech in this campaign he used a memorable phrase: “All this talk about the dissolution of the Union is humbug, nothing but folly. *We do not want to dissolve the Union; you shall not.*” In the speech delivered at Springfield, Illinois, at the close of the Republican State Convention of 1858,—in which he had been named as candidate for United States Senator,—the skilful and serious orator rises not merely to the broad level of nationality, but to the high plane of universal humanity. As events thicken and threaten, his style becomes more solemn. So telling at last his power of phrase, that it would hardly

## GENIUS FOR EXPRESSION

seem to be an exaggeration to declare that the war itself was partly induced by the fact that Abraham Lincoln was able to express his pregnant thoughts with the art of a master. How familiar now these words of prophecy :—

“‘ A house divided against itself cannot stand.’ I believe this government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved—I do not expect the house to fall—but I do expect it will cease to be divided.”

### v

The cadence of Lincoln’s prose with its burden of high hope, touched with that heroism which is so near to pathos, reminds one of the *Leitmotif*, the “leading motive,” in symphony and music-drama of which musicians make use, and

## GENIUS FOR EXPRESSION

which is especially characteristic of the manner of Wagner. Listen :—

“ Two years ago the Republicans of the nation mustered over thirteen hundred thousand strong. We did this under the single impulse of resistance to a common danger, with every external circumstance against us. Of strange, discordant, and even hostile elements, we gathered from the four winds, and formed and fought the battle through, under the constant hot fire of a disciplined, proud, and pampered enemy. Did we brave all then to falter now — now, when that same enemy is wavering, dissevered, and bellicerent? The result is not doubtful. *We shall not fail — if we stand firm, we shall not fail. Wise counsels may accelerate or mistakes delay it, but, sooner or later, the victory is sure to come.*”

We have arrived now at the period of

## GENIUS FOR EXPRESSION

the joint debate between Lincoln and Douglas. In Lincoln we have the able and practiced attorney, with one side of his nature open to the eternal; in Douglas the skilful lawyer, adroit and ambitious, not so easily moved by the moral appeals which quickly took hold upon Lincoln, but a man capable of right and patriotic action when the depths of his nature were stirred.

Among the most characteristic qualities of Lincoln's expression are its morality, its insight, and its prophecy; and in the now famous debate he reached well-nigh the fullness of his power to put great thoughts into fitting language. His words went straight into the minds and hearts of eagerly listening crowds. The question, he contended, was as to the right or the wrong of slavery:—

“That [he said] is the real issue.

## GENIUS FOR EXPRESSION

That is the issue that will continue in this country when these poor tongues of Judge Douglas and myself shall be silent. It is the eternal struggle between these two principles—right and wrong—throughout the world. They are the two principles that have stood face to face from the beginning of time, and will ever continue to struggle. The one is the common right of humanity, and the other the divine right of kings."

### VI

It is interesting to recall the fact that, in the pause of his affairs after the debate with Douglas, Lincoln took up the then popular custom of lyceum-lecturing. In the very year before his election to the presidency the great orator and statesman was engaged in delivering a totally uninspired lecture on "Discoveries, Inven-

## GENIUS FOR EXPRESSION

tions, and Improvements," in towns near Springfield, and in Springfield itself on Washington's Birthday in the fateful year of 1860. There was little in this lecture to attract the slightest attention; and while it may have given satisfaction among neighbors, it could never have added to his fame. Yet, when he had the opportunity of an engagement to lecture on political subjects in this same month of February, he made what is now known as the "great address" at Cooper Union.

In opening his remarks Lincoln spoke modestly of what he proposed to do in this address. But his argument was, really, not only new but remarkable. It concerned the attitude of the fathers as to the control of slavery in the Territories, and took the ground that the federal government was not forbidden there to

## GENIUS FOR EXPRESSION

control the “institution.” Senator Douglas had brought the matter up in a speech in the preceding autumn, but, while taking the opposite ground, he had presented no array of facts in support of his contention.

It is told in New York, now nearly half a century after the event, by those who heard Lincoln on that memorable night, that this was a performance very different from what many in the audience anticipated — more sober and weighty than might have been expected from the Western lawyer and successful political debater, who yet was a graduate of no school. The not too well-fitting clothes and the long and lank appearance of the orator were not a surprise, nor were some of his quaint and unconventional gestures; but the intellectual quality of the discourse tallied only with the thoughts

## GENIUS FOR EXPRESSION

and hopes of the little group of men who had heard of his accomplishments in Illinois and had invited him to a metropolitan platform.

There is a story that Abram Hewitt —than whom no keener-witted man then went his ways in New York—was in the building that night on business for his father-in-law, Peter Cooper. It is said that he paused at a doorway leading into the hall, and catching a sentence remarkable for its clarity and force, remained till the last word was uttered, and, like Bryant, became from that occasion a firm admirer, at first hand, of the rising statesman. It is known that, whatever the circumstances that brought young Hewitt to the hall, he did hear the address, and from that hour cherished no doubt as to the character and abilities of Abraham Lincoln.

## GENIUS FOR EXPRESSION

Forty years after the event, so distinguished an expert as Ambassador Choate told, in an address in Edinburgh, the effect of Lincoln's argument upon himself and upon the entire audience in Cooper Union, which included "all the learned and cultured of his party in New York." As he talked to young Choate before the meeting he seemed ill at ease and in dread of strange and critical hearers. But, says the later orator: "He was equal to the occasion." For an hour and a half he held his audience in the hollow of his hand. The "Tribune" said the next morning: "No man ever before made such an impression on his first appeal to a New York audience."

Nearly fifty years after this address, Mr. George Haven Putnam, whose father was on the list of inviters, has told of his youthful impressions. He does not claim

## GENIUS FOR EXPRESSION

that he had any adequate appreciation of the speaker's reasoning; but he remembers that he was at once impressed with the feeling that here was a political leader whose methods differed from those of any politician to whom he had hitherto listened. He adds that if it had not been for "the impression made upon New York by Lincoln's speech and by the man himself," the vote of New York could not have been secured, in the coming May, for his nomination.

Two members of "The Young Men's Republican Union," Mr. Charles C. Nott and Mr. Cephas Brainerd,—who have had the satisfaction of seeing Lincoln's centennial fitly celebrated,—assumed the task of annotating the address for pamphlet reproduction. It took them months to collect the material for their illustrative citations, for they had to do

## GENIUS FOR EXPRESSION

the work without assistance from the orator himself, who, in those days of few libraries, few indices, and few tables of contents, was unable to refer them specifically to his authorities.

It has taken some persons of supposed perception many years to arrive at conclusions concerning Lincoln's genius for expression which these young editors had the opportunity of reaching, through these interesting labors in the year before the war. In a prophetic preface to the pamphlet edition of the address they said :—

From the first line to the last — from his premises to his conclusion, he travels with a swift, unerring directness which no logician ever excelled — an argument complete and full, without the affectation of learning, and without the stiffness which usually accompanies dates and details. A single, easy, simple

## GENIUS FOR EXPRESSION

sentence of plain Anglo-Saxon words contains a chapter of history, that, in some instances, has taken days of labor to verify, and which must have cost the author months of investigation to acquire. And, though the public should justly estimate the labor bestowed on the facts which are stated, they cannot estimate the greater labor involved on those which are omitted — how many pages have been read — how many works examined — what numerous statutes, resolutions, speeches, letters, and biographies have been looked through. Commencing with this address as a political pamphlet, the reader will leave it as an historical work — brief, complete, profound, impartial, truthful — which will survive the time and the occasion that called it forth, and be esteemed hereafter, no less for its intrinsic worth than its unpretending modesty.

The address closed with one of Lincoln's most famous and characteristic sayings : “ Let us have faith that right makes

## GENIUS FOR EXPRESSION

might, and in that faith, let us, to the end, dare to do our duty as we understand it."

This address of Lincoln, and the other addresses which he made during his eastern visit, proved momentous. He himself, at the time, had not the slightest idea of the importance of the tour. In fact he intended no tour; he simply expected to fulfill his engagement at Cooper Union, and then to visit his oldest son, who was at school at Exeter, New Hampshire. The other invitations to make addresses were unexpected. They were eleven in number, confined to Rhode Island, New Hampshire (in the company of his son), and Connecticut. From Exeter on March 4, 1860, he wrote as follows to Mrs. Lincoln:—

“I have been unable to escape this toil. If I had foreseen it, I think I would

## GENIUS FOR EXPRESSION

not have come East at all. The speech at New York, being within my calculation before I started, went off passably well and gave me no trouble whatever. The difficulty was to make nine others [two were added subsequently to the list], before reading audiences who have already seen all my ideas in print.”<sup>1</sup>

Already he was the West’s man. He had now, without knowing it, captured the East. In a little more than two months he was nominated, in November he was elected, and on the very anniversary of the date of his letter to Mrs. Lincoln, he was inaugurated President of the United States.

With this Eastern tour, and with his election to the Presidency, he may be said to have resumed his true literary

<sup>1</sup> From unpublished manuscript by courtesy of the Hon. Robert T. Lincoln.

## GENIUS FOR EXPRESSION

career, for (as I have said) his style was at its best only when he was dealing with a cause which enlisted his whole heart.

### VII

By way of contrast to what has passed and is to come, let us cull some of the passages in which shone Lincoln's wit and humor. How pleasing it is to know that his melancholy nature, his burdened spirit, were refreshed with glimpses — often storms — of mirth !

It is thought by some that the nature of certain of the stories attributed to Lincoln detract from his greatness — attributed, I say, for we all know how, so soon as a man is given a name for wit, an apocrypha at once begins. Now it must be understood that Lincoln had a mind of such breadth as to suggest a quality Shakesperean. He was interested

## GENIUS FOR EXPRESSION

in human phenomena of every kind. The human animal interested and amused him. So, in private conversation, he often drew his illustrations from the rough jokes characteristic of frontier life — told by him with a boyish sense of humor. Some men tell stories that make the hearers loathe the teller; but we have it on the authority of living witnesses who knew him well that no such stories issued from Lincoln's lips.

His forensic wit came out sharply in one of his well-known congressional speeches, in which he referred with grim sarcasm to General Cass's military record as used for political ammunition. Here are some later touches of his wit: "The plainest print cannot be read through a gold eagle." "If you think you can slander a woman into loving you, or a man into voting for you, try it till you

## GENIUS FOR EXPRESSION

are satisfied." "Has Douglas the exclusive right in this country to be on all sides of all questions?" Again: "In his numerous speeches now being made in Illinois, Senator Douglas regularly argues against the doctrine of the equality of men; and while he does not draw the conclusion that the superiors ought to enslave the inferiors, he evidently wishes his hearers to draw that conclusion. He shirks the responsibility of pulling the house down, but he digs under it that it may fall of its own weight."

"The enemy would fight," said the President in a letter to General Hooker, "in intrenchments, and have you at a disadvantage, and so, man for man, worst you at that point, while his main force would in some way be getting an advantage of you northward. In one word, I would not take any risk of being en-

## GENIUS FOR EXPRESSION

tangled upon the river like an ox jumped half over a fence and liable to be torn by dogs front and rear without a fair chance to gore one way and kick the other." It was also to Hooker that he wrote: "Only those generals who gain successes can set up dictators. What I now ask of you is military success, and I will risk the dictatorship."

In a letter written in 1859 to a Boston committee he said, in describing a change in party standards: "I remember being once much amused at seeing two partially intoxicated men engaged in a fight with their greatcoats on, which fight, after a long and rather harmless contest, ended in each having fought himself out of his own coat and into that of the other. If the two leading parties of this day are really identical with the two in the days of Jefferson and Adams, they have per-

## GENIUS FOR EXPRESSION

formed the same feat as the two drunken men." And this is from his very last public address: "Concede that the new government of Louisiana is only to what it should be as the egg is to the fowl, we shall sooner have the fowl by hatching the egg than by smashing it."

A specimen of his spoken wit is the story told of his reply to the countryman who at a reception said,—in the prepared speech that patriots so often shoot at the President as they plunge past him in the processions through the White House,—"I believe in God Almighty and Abraham Lincoln."—"You're more than half right," quickly answered the President. When, at a conference with Confederate leaders, he was reminded by the Southern commissioner, Mr. Hunter, that Charles I entered into an agreement with "parties in arms

## GENIUS FOR EXPRESSION

against the government,” Lincoln said: “I do not profess to be posted in history. In all such matters I will turn you over to Seward. All I distinctly recollect about the case of Charles I is that he lost his head.”

### VIII

Lincoln was elected to the Presidency of a country on the verge of civil war. In his farewell to his fellow townsmen sounds again that musical “motive” of which I have spoken, recurring like the refrain of a sad, heroic poem. Remember the passage quoted before. It occurred in his speech of 1858: “The result is not doubtful. We shall not fail—if we stand firm, we shall not fail. Wise counsels may accelerate or mistakes delay it, but, sooner or later, the victory is sure to come.”

## GENIUS FOR EXPRESSION

In parting from his old neighbors he said:—

“Here my children have been born, and one is buried. I now leave, not knowing when or whether ever I may return, with a task before me greater than that which rested upon Washington. Without the assistance of that Divine Being who ever attended him I cannot succeed. With that assistance I cannot fail. Trusting in Him who can go with me and remain with you, and be everywhere for good, let us confidently hope that all will yet be well.”

The First Inaugural concluded with a passage of great tenderness. We learn from Nicolay and Hay that the fortunate suggestion of that passage, its first draft indeed, came from Seward. But compare this first draft with the passage as amended and adopted by Lincoln!

## GENIUS FOR EXPRESSION

This is Seward's:—

“ I close. We are not, we must not be, aliens or enemies, but fellow-countrymen and brethren. Although passion has strained our bonds of affection too hardly, they must not, I am sure they will not, be broken. The mystic chords which, proceeding from so many battle-fields and so many patriot graves, pass through all the hearts and all hearths in this broad continent of ours, will yet again harmonize in their ancient music when breathed upon by the guardian angel of the nation.”

And this is Lincoln's:—

“ I am loth to close. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot

## GENIUS FOR EXPRESSION

grave to every living heart and hearth-stone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature."

There is in this last something that suggests music; again we hear the strain of the *Leitmotif*. Strangely enough, in 1858 Lincoln himself had used a figure not the same as, but suggestive of, this very one now given by Seward. He was speaking of the moral sentiment, the sentiment of equality, in the Declaration of Independence. "*That*," he said, "is the electric chord in that Declaration, that links the hearts of patriotic and liberty-loving men together, that will link those patriotic hearts as long as the love of freedom exists in the minds of men throughout the world."

In the final paragraph of the Second

## GENIUS FOR EXPRESSION

Inaugural we find again the haunting music with which the First Inaugural closed. On the heart of what American, — North or South, — are not the words imprinted?

“With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation’s wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan — to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves, and with all nations.”

As the great musician brings somewhere to its highest expression the motive which has been entwined from first to last in his music-drama, so did the expression of Lincoln’s passion for his country reach its culmination in the ten-

## GENIUS FOR EXPRESSION

der and majestic phrases of the Gettysburg Address:—

“In a larger sense, we cannot dedicate—we cannot consecrate—we cannot hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us, the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to the cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion; that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain;

## GENIUS FOR EXPRESSION

that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom; and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”

But there is a letter of Lincoln’s which may well be associated with the Gettysburg Address. It was written, just one year after the delivery of the Address, to a mother who, the President had been told, had lost five sons in the army. I believe the number was not so large, though that does not matter: —

“ EXECUTIVE MANSION,

“ WASHINGTON, November 21, 1864.

“ MRS. BIXBY,

“ Boston, Massachusetts.

“ DEAR MADAM: I have been shown in the files of the War Department a statement of the Adjutant-General of Massachusetts that you are the mother

## GENIUS FOR EXPRESSION

of five sons who have died gloriously on the field of battle. I feel how weak and fruitless must be any words of mine which should attempt to beguile you from the grief of a loss so overwhelming. But I cannot refrain from tendering to you the consolation that may be found in the thanks of the Republic they died to save. I pray that our heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement, and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom. Yours very sincerely and respectfully,

“ABRAHAM LINCOLN.”

This letter of consolation in its simplicity and fitness again recalls the Greek spirit. The letter, and the Gettysburg

## **GENIUS FOR EXPRESSION**

address, are like those calm and well-wrought monuments of grief which the traveler may still behold in that small cemetery, under the deep Athenian sky, where those who have been for ages dead are kept alive in the memories of men by an immortal art.



The Riverside Press  
CAMBRIDGE · MASSACHUSETTS  
U. S. A







LIBRARY  
DEPARTMENT  
This book is under no circumstances to be  
taken from the Building



